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ABSTRACT

This document discusses whether young people with difficulty entering adulthood can be helped, or if accumulated effects of various adversitites have caused irremediable damage. First the developmental tasks that adolescents need to accomplish before they can take on adult roles are described. Next, two well-known explanations for youths' failure to accomplish these tasks are presented. The first explanation discussed assumes that individual defects, thought to result from flaws in genetic make-up, upbringing, or character, prevent young people from functioning within acceptable norms. The second explanation presented blames youths' problems on environmental flaws beyond the control of the family and developing child. It is noted that proponents of this explanation tend to be optimistic about young people's capacity to change in response to changes in the environment. A research review is presented which analyzes evidence about the capacity of young people in trouble to change course and about contextual attributes that promote and hinder accomplishment of developmental tasks. The discussion concludes that no one factor alone accounts for the difficulties many youths have in taking on adult roles. Common characteristics of circumstances shown to promote positive changes in young people are listed. Two commentaries on the document are included. (ABL)

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Determinants of Youth's Successful Entry into Adulthood

by
Sarah Gideonse

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Youth and America's Future:
The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship

YOUTH AND AMERICA'S FUTURE:
THE WILLIAM T. GRANT FOUNDATION COMMISSION ON WORK, FAMILY AND CITIZENSHIP

When William Thomas Grant established the Grant Foundation in 1936, he sought a better understanding of the ways in which individuals adapt to the vicissitudes of life. Touched in his professional life by the importance of good human relationships, Mr. Grant wished to "help children develop what is in them" so they would better "enjoy all the good things the world has to offer them."

Fifty years later, recognizing the special needs of older adolescents in our changing society, the Foundation's Trustees established **Youth and America's Future** with much the same purpose; its charge is to evaluate current knowledge, stimulate new ideas, increase communication among researchers, practitioners and policymakers, and, thus, to help our nation chart a better future for youth.

The Foundation's President, Robert J. Haggerty, M.D., has described the Commission's unique perspective:

"Against a rising chorus of legitimate concern about the many problems facing today's youth, the Foundation has initiated this Commission on Youth and America's Future to speak in a different voice. It will explore the strengths of America's young men and women, their famlilies and the programs and community institutions that serve them. We adopt this approach not to diminish the importance of the problems that exist, but to learn the lessons of success. The Foundation is confident that this effort to look with renewed respect at youth, where it strides as well as where it stumbles, will help forge the links of understanding and mutual responsibility that make our democracy strong."

The publications in this series have been prepared to inform the Commission and to stimulate its thinking. While the Commission does not necessarily endorse the various findings presented, it does encourage their thoughtful consideration in the interests of American youth.

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DETERMINANTS OF YOUTH'S SUCCESSFUL ENTRY INTO ADULTHOOD

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April 1988

DETERMINANTS OF YOUTH'S SUCCESSFUL ENTRY INTO ADULTHOOD

Sarah Gideonse

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DETERMINANTS OF YOUTH'S SUCCESSFUL ENTRY INTO ADULTHOOD

Executive Summary

Although young people vary in the degree and kind of difficulty they encounter as they enter adulthood, the future of too many is bleak. Can we help these young people during adolescence? Or have the accumulated effects of genetics, upbringing, childhood adversities, encounters with unresponsive and discriminatory institutions, and restricted opportunities caused irremediable damage by the time they have reached high school? If not, can we intervene in the life trajectories of these youths to improve their chances of fulfilling their obligations to society and of building productive lives?

This paper addresses these questions. It begins with a description of the developmental tasks that adolescents need to accomplish before they can take on adult roles. The paper then presents two well-known explanations for youths' failure to accomplish these tasks. The first assumes that individual defects prevent young people from functioning within acceptable norms. The defects are thought to result from flaws in genetic make-up, upbringing, and character. Young people are seen as both responsible for their own problems and responsible for their own improvement. At the same time, doubt exists about the capacity of young people to change because of the durable effects of early experience on acquired traits.

The second explanation blames youths' problems on environmental flaws beyond the control of the family and developing child. Examples are economic cycles, the structure of the labor market, discrimination, and other concurrent life events and circumstances of adolescence. Proponents of this explanation tend to be optimistic about young people's capacity to change in response to changes in the environment.

A review of research analyzes evidence about (1) the capacity of young people in trouble to change course and (2) contextual attributes that promote and hinder

accomplishment of developmental tasks. The discussion concludes that no one factor -- inherited traits, upbringing, or the "environment" -- alone accounts for the difficulties many youths have in taking on adult roles. Personal attributes are important, and childhood experiences, particularly in the context of poverty, can be damaging. Circumstances that adolescents encounter also make the transition to adulthood difficult. However, human beings have an in-born and developed capacity to change throughout life. The paper ends by listing common characteristics of circumstances shown to promote positive changes in young people.

DETERMINANTS OF YOUTH'S SUCCESSFUL ENTRY INTO ADULTHOOD

Introduction

An increasing number of young people are at risk of failing to fulfill expected adult roles. The facts are familiar. One in eight of all 17 year-olds is functionally illiterate. An increasing proportion of teen-agers leaves school before graduating, and many who stay in school are de facto drop outs. Those out of school are unable to support themselves in acceptable ways (Sumi, Harrington, & Goedicke, 1987): Many work only sporadically or perform unreliably at jobs. Many support themselves through the underground economy in illegal or "off the books" activities, or they live on the dole (Anderson, 1980; Ianni, 1983). In 1984, only 42% of males 20 to 24 made enough money to lift a family of three out of poverty. Since 1973 the proportion of male high school dropouts able to support a family declined from 59% to 32% for all races; to 40% for white males, to 30% for Hispanic males, and to only 11% for black males (Children's Defense Fund, 1987). One survey found that one quarter of the income of inner city black youths came from crime and that nearly one third of the youths thought they could earn more on the street than from legitimate jobs (Freeman & Holzer, 1985). Many young people conceive children, but fail to form two-parent families. Minority and low income youth are disproportionately represented in these dismal statistics.

Youthful problems with schooling, work, and family formation often do not correct themselves in time. The longer young women remain on welfare, for example, the less likely they are to become self-supporting (Rein & Rainwater, 1977). The causes of initial employment problems are likely to persist, and failure to acquire work experience affects later chances for good employment and wages (Raelin, 1980; Saks & Smith, 1981).

The public's reaction is varied. A vocal minority is outraged by these youths'

apparent lack of commitment to the work ethic, traditional family roles, and other mainstream values. The business community worries about the growing danger of labor shortages: too many of the current youth cohort, already smaller than in the past, are unsuited to the demands of a service and technically oriented economy. Many people are troubled about the "waste and destruction of lives" (Lefkowitz, 1987, p. 25).

Although young people may vary in the degree and kind of difficulty they are encountering as they enter adulthood, the future of too many is bleak. Can we help these young people during adolescence? Or have the accumulated effects of genetics, upbringing, childhood adversities, encounters with unresponsive and discriminatory institutions, and restricted opportunities caused irremediable damage by the time they reach high school age? If not, can we intervene in the life trajectories of these youths to give them a better chance to fulfill their obligations to society and to build productive lives (Inkeles, 1969; Elder, 1985)?

This paper addresses these questions. It begins with a description of the developmental tasks that adolescents need to accomplish before they can take on adult roles. The paper then presents two well-known explanations for youth's failure to accomplish these tasks. An examination of relevant research follows. This focuses on available evidence on (1) the capacity of young people in trouble to change course and (2) contextual attributes that promote and hinder adolescents' accomplishment of developmental tasks. Finally, the paper will derive some conclusions about the parameters for effective interventions.

Tasks of Adolescence

"Developmental tasks involve a series of problems, challenges, or life adjustment situations that come from biological development, social expectations, and personal actions" (Baltes, 1987, p. 614). A widely used framework for charting psychosocial development follows Erikson (1959, 1968) in viewing adolescents' central tasks as separating from their families, becoming self-reliant, and establishing an integrated identity. The identity, a "continuing entity in the midst of flux," (Campbell, 1969, p. 826), pulls together" what [adolescents] remember that they were in the past, what they feel they are now, and what they imagine they will become" (Gold & Petronio, 1980, p. 501). Adolescents need to take increasing responsibility for what they do and what they are (Josselson, 1980) and to develop an inner conviction about their chances of accomplishing life aims. Part of their task is to acquire a set of principles that commits them to society and the future.

In becoming adult, young people adopt roles that fit their aspirations and talents and that fit society's expectations for them (Anderson & Fleming, 1986; White & Speisman, 1977, p. 41). To do so requires knowledge of available social, economic, and sexual roles, as well as the ability to perform the roles without overwhelming conflict (Brim & Wheeler, 1966, pp. 25-26). Adolescents learn to be adult through "practice in 'make believe' [like extracurricular activities] in organizational settings [of] the skills and constraint and presentation needed for success in .... an industrial, bureaucratized society" (Campbell, 1969, p. 823).

Young people make a public statement of their identity by choosing and preparing themselves for an occupation, what some analysts refer to as an instrumental identity. Choosing an occupation is important because society identifies individuals by what they do, what they make, and how they perform (Rainwater, 1970). An occupation allows a person to become economically self-

sufficient.

Even in the best of circumstances, adolescence can be a time of greater self-consciousness, lowered self-esteem, depressive feelings, and anxieties about the future. Most adolescents continue to identify with their parents, to want their approval, and to seek their guidance in matters of values (Rutter, 1980; Adelson & Doehrman, 1980). However, peers take on new salience. Peers can both help and deter the accomplishment of adolescent tasks. Adolescents may turn to peers when alienated from society's goals, but peers can also buffer the transition between childhood and adulthood when standards are changing and meaningful roles are deferred (Campbell, 1969).

As part of their development, adolescents gain new capacities that help them accomplish the tasks of adolescence. Their size and strength increases, and they can reason in more complex and abstract ways (Piaget, 1968). The basis for conforming to societal rules shifts (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971). Adolescents generally develop an extended time perspective, increased capacity for self-reflection, and improved impulse control (Peterson & Crocket, 1986). However, aside from physical growth, these developments are by no means assured.

Some investigators use the concept of identity statuses to classify youth by their commitment to occupation and ideology following an explicit decision-making period. Persons with an achieved identity have made conscious choices about occupation and principles. Some youths take on foreclosed identities without choosing among alternatives: they meet parental demands (Marcia, 1980) or traditional role expectations (Speisman & White, 1977), or they act on perceptions that few choices are available (Hauser, 1971). Teen-age mothers, for example, often have foreclosed identities. Youths with diffused identities or role confusion have no set direction and are not searching for one, lacking trust in their capacity

to make the right decision. Those in moratorium are in crisis, but searching for commitments. It is also possible for youth to achieve negative identities, opposite from the values and goals of parents and society (Hauser, 1971; Erikson, 1968; Speisman & White, 1977).

Although useful as a framework for thinking about adolescent tasks, it is important to note that these concepts of identity have historical referents. Raskin (1985, p. 25) notes that opportunity for genuine occupational choice is fairly recent, dating from the Industrial Revolution for white males, and that "true vocational choice for women and nonwhites is a newly emerging phenomenon." Although socially confirmed roles, wife and homemaker fit less well than occupations into the concept of achieved instrumental identities. Furthermore, the centrality of occupation to identity, even for men, may be changing. Because of changes in the job market, young people find identifying a career path increasingly problematic, and many people are obliged to switch careers during their lifetimes. Personal characteristics, like flexibility and possession of a variety of skills, are necessary. Because people observe that hard work and merit do not guarantee success, they may turn to their private lives to achieve success (Goldstein & Smucker, 1986).

Over the years analysts have offered a number of explanations for the problems that youth present to society. Traditionally, most fall into two categories, reflecting prevalent folk theories about why some people are more successful than others. Folk theories are partly based on ideology, partly based on social knowledge, and they inform the work of social critics and social scientists as well as the views of the public.

The first of these folk theories focuses on youths' deficits, often disparagingly. It blames youths' problems on flaws in their genetic make-up, family and cultural background, observed characteristics, and choices they make about school, friends,

sex, and jobs. For example, youth are faulted for lack of ambition, talent, perseverance, and morality. According to the argument, since young people are responsible for their problems, they must take responsibility for solving them. At the same time, doubt exists about the capacity of young people to change.

The second folk theory explains youth's problems on environmental flaws beyond the control of the family and the developing child and adolescent: economic cycles, the structure of the labor market, prejudice, increased opportunities for delinquency, and other concurrent life events and circumstances of adolescence. Proponents tend to be optimistic about young people's capacity to change in response to changes in the environment.

I will review the traditional explanations first. While they may appear simplistic, they are still influential. Then I will turn to models based on current social knowledge.

Individual Explanations

This explanation assumes that individual defects prevent young people from functioning within acceptable norms (Warren, 1971). Some youths have problems because they differ in important ways from mainstream youths. Some analysts argue that inherited characteristics play a significant role. Others focus on childhood experiences, particularly family upbringing. The impact of the family's socio-economic status and ethnic group is a common theme.

Explanations based on innate racial and sexual deficits have fallen into disrepute. But no one questions the effects on development of physical and mental handicaps, such as blindness, below-average intelligence, and learning disabilities. In some places, for example, over half of school dropouts have been found to suffer from organic impairments, often untreated (Lefkowitz, 1981). And as we shall see

below, the influence of inherited attributes on children's development is an emerging theoretical preoccupation (Lerner, 1984; Scarr & McCartney, 1983; and Werner, 1987). However, most contemporary commentary on individual deficits has focused on effects of child rearing on observable characteristics.

The culture of poverty theory presents one version of the position that faults the young person's upbringing. It offers an explanation for the failures of children from impoverished, often minority, families that rear the greatest proportion of children at risk. Propounded first by Oscar Lewis (1966, p. 6) in reference to the adaptation "of the poor to their marginal position in a class stratified, highly individuated capitalist society," the theory argues that intergenerational transmission of maladapative attitudes through family socialization prevents poor youths from competing successfully at school and work. Parents are said to pass on inadequate cognitive and language skills (Bernstein, 1971; Hess & Shipman, 1965); low aspiration and tolerance of illegal means of subsistence (Gold & Perronio, 1980); an ideology of despair (Ogbu, 1981); "feelings of fatalism, helplessness, dependence, and inferiority .., [and] a strong present orientation with relatively little disposition to defer gratification and plan for the future" (Lewis, 1966, p. 7).

The culture of poverty is said to assign low salience to instrumental identities. Walter Miller's description of lower class gang behavior follows this argument. Such behavior, according to Miller, reflects "focal concerns" of lower class culture, "a long-established distinctively patterned tradition with an integrity of its own." The concerns include "trouble ... getting into trouble and staying out of trouble"; "toughness," what we now call macho, a "compulsive reaction formation" to being reared by mothers in fatherless homes; "smartness," the capacity to outwit and avoid being outwitted; "excitement," interest in sex, alcohol, and gambling; "fate," a belief that people have little control over their lives'; and "autonomy," ambivalent

attitudes toward authority, discipline and constraint (Miller, 1958, p. 458).

According to Banfield, writing after several years of federal intervention to reduce poverty, people are lower class because of their inability to look ahead, control impulses, and engage in self-improvement. They are unable "to discipline ... [themselves] to sacrifice for future satisfactions" (1970, p. 47). This inability, learned early, prevents them from taking advantage of changed opportunities: "Even if there were a lively demand at high wages for all the labor in the city," lower class members would work "only intermittently. ... They will not accept the discipline that a job usually imposes" (p. 112).

In sum, the theory argues that the culture of poverty is deviant and that the family as a "passive agent of its culture" (Inkeles, 1955, pp. 392-3) fails to promote in its children the values and competence necessary for adult functioning. Later experiences are unable to offset the effects of early learning. In support of this thesis, proponents cite an extensive body of research on the permanent impact of early experiences on individuals' intelligence, competencies, and personality (e.g., Hunt, 1961, 1979; Bloom, 1964).

Several other theoretical traditions in the social sciences link early family experiences with children's personalities and accomplishments. Particularly influential, psychoanalytic theory holds that much of an individual's "unconscious material of personality is accumulated ... and characteristic modes of defense ... established" in the early years and that both are difficult to change with routine socialization procedures (Brim & Wheeler, 1966, p. 21).

A basic tenet of psychoanalytic theory is the relationship between children's experiences in dealing with a succession of childhood conflicts and their difficulties in establishing an identity as adolescents and forming intimate relationships as adults. For example, young people may take on negative identities when excessive

parental demands undermine their self-certainty about accomplishing life aims, so critical to identity development. Some of these youths may turn to peers to achieve high self-esteem and form relationships that can lead to deviant actions because negative identities serve their purpose best before an audience (Erikson, 1959; Eskelson, Wiley, Muehlbauer & Dodder, 1986).

Developmental psychology follows psychoanalytic theory in assuming that developmental tasks are accomplished sequentially, that accomplishment of tasks changes individuals' functioning qualitatively, and that successful accomplishment of later tasks depends on successful resolutions of earlier stages (Erikson, 1963; Vaillant & Mirofsky, 1980).

Investigations based on social learning theory document relationships between parental nurturance and style of discipline and such outcomes as moral development, attitudes, academic achievement, and social and psychological adjustment (e.g., Baumrind, 1971; Hoffman, 1970). A dramatic example of these links is the contrasting adult personalities that result from the familial and cultural socialization of Japanese and American children (e.g., Vogel, 1971). Social learning theorists argue that early learning is more durable because it is likely to be partially and continuously reinforced by powerful and emotionally involved parents (Brim & Wheeler, 1966).

Interactionists also point out that behavior can become habitual over time. For example, individuals will continue to use what are called "self-other" patterns of interaction learned as children with significant family members. That is, they will behave the same way they did as children and as other members of their families did. This will occur not only when people encounter similar situations and people (as, for example, when a man encounters an authoritarian boss like his father). People may also select familiar situations or structure ambiguous situations to evoke

familiar patterns. For reasons not fully understood, some people are more likely than others to repeat former patterns rigidly (Cottrell, 1969).

Elder's (1974) study of the long-term impact on children experiencing economic deprivation during the Great Depression is an example of research drawing on these theoretical traditions. In the study, teen-agers whose families became poor during the Depression did better economically and psychologically than teen-agers whose family income was less affected. Economic hardship gave the deprived group a chance to experience adult roles and to gain a sense of autonomy, competence, and worth. For them coping with stress ultimately provided benefits. However, children who were very young when their families became poor did worse than non-deprived children. Compared to the teen-agers, the younger children were more vulnerable to the psychological changes in their parents brought on by the Depression. They were exposed to hardship over a longer period of time (Elder & Rockwell, 1979). The stesses associated with deprivation affected this group as adolescents when they encountered "demanding situations that call[ed] upon their adaptive resources" (p. 274). Even those who managed to enter college were "characterized by lack of self-esteem and personal meaning in life, by a tendency to withdraw from adversity, avoid commitments, and employ self-defeating tactics, and by a sense of victimization and vulnerability to the judgment of others" (p. 271).

The culture of poverty theory and other theories that emphasize the importance of early learning have offered a ready explanation for the persistence of an underclass despite a general prosperity and unprecedented public expenditures to rid our nation of poverty. The belief in the durable effects of early experience plays an important role in government support for early childhood programs such as Headstart. Hobbs and Robinson (1982) argue that assumptions about the importance of early experience for cognitive development affected federal decisions to focus

interventions for adolescents on the development of job related skills instead of on the improvement of cognitive functioning. And the ideas have reappeared in current policy debates about the underclass (e.g., Lemann, 1986). Just recently, the Committee for Economic Development (1987) urged "early and sustained intervention in the lives of disadvantaged children ... [to change the home environment and to] break [the] vicious cycle of disaffection and despair." Last year the New Republic trumpeted the Work Ethic State as "the only way to break the culture of poverty":

> ...Neither robust economic growth nor massive government transfer payments can by themselves transform a "community" where 90 percent of the children are born into fatherless families, where over 60 percent of the population is on welfare, where the work ethic has evaporated and the entrepreneurial drive is channeled into gangs and drug-pushing (Kaus, 1986, p. 22).

Environmental Explanations

The second common explanation singles out environmental factors as primarily responsible for youths' problems in taking on adult roles. Environmental factors are thought to influence young people directly, not through their culture or their family. Proponents tend to be optimistic about the capacity of youth to "make it," once structural impediments to success are removed. Unlike individual explanations, environmental explanations, at least in pure form, are increasingly unfashionable.

Those who blame environmental factors for youth's difficulties claim that the institutions purported to serve youth often fail them. The schools are unsuccessful in motivating many young people to achieve. They track less academically promising youths into general and vocational programs that provide them with neither the marketable skills nor the know-how to get and keep jobs (Reubens, 1974; Meyer & Wise, 1982). When disadvantaged youths observe that good job opportunities are systematically denied to certain groups for reasons over which they have no control, then they may not take school work seriously (Ogbu, 1974).

Initial encounters with the labor market can also discourage poor and minority young people about the likelihood of finding a job or finding a job that is decent. Most of the available jobs are low in status and pay. Such jobs provide little security or chance for advancement. Tasks are routine, even demeaning; they offer little in terms of "prestige, pride, and self-respect' (Liebow, 1967).

Moreover, disadvantaged youth must often contend with job discrimination. In recruiting new workers, employers use race, class, and sex as ways of estimating likely job performance (Feagin & Eckberg, 1980; Parnes, 1979). White youths are much more successful than black youths in obtaining jobs (Freeman & Holzer, 1985). Even when disadvantaged youths obtain good jobs, they may fail because they are socially unacceptable to established workers. Social acceptance is a prerequisite for

the informal on-the-job guidance so necessary for job success (Doeringer & Piore, 1975). Young people without confidence that their job opportunities will improve may view such jobs as "emblematic of future treatment and prospects" (Osterman, 1982). Young men with poor job prospects and a history of subemployment are less likely to marry and form two-parent families (Liebow, 1967).

Some observers have cited the effect of the "promised land syndrome," contending that young blacks are less willing than in the past to work in society's marginal jobs (Anderson, 1980). Some evidence indicates that low income and black youth are actually more willing to work at low to average wages than other youth (Borus, 1983); however, another study found that inner city black youths are more likely to work longer in jobs that require skills and pay decent wages (Freeman & Holzer, 1985).

Some analysts also argue that some youths deliberately confine themselves to jobs in the secondary labor market because they want temporary work or jobs with flexible standards about performance, honesty, and attendance (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). More often, however, youths find themselves confined to such jobs because they lack credentials for better jobs, or better jobs are in inaccessible locations, or employers are unwilling to hire young people, particularly poor blacks and Hispanics.

Jobs available to youths are unlikely to improve (that is, to pay significantly higher wages, provide job security, and upgrade working conditions) because most are in the secondary labor market. As such, they serve as a way for certain industries to respond to seasonal production, low profit margins, and fluctuating demand for products. Unpredictable labor requirements and stiff competition make it unprofitable for employers to invest in extensive training or to provide the types of benefits characteristic of primary sector jobs.

Another problem is that entry-level positions open to young people are particularly sensitive to economic fluctuations (Freeman & Wise, 1982). Moreover, low-skill, entry level jobs appropriate for dropouts and recent high school graduates are far scarcer than formerly. This situation reflects changes in the industrial mix, in the skill requirements of jobs, and in the availability of other workers, such as older women (Lerman, 1986).

Thus jobs are scarce and those that exist pay low wages and offer little security and status. Moreover, rules for programs providing income and in-kind subsidies discourage steady work and the formation of two-parent families (Gideonse, 1986). Alternative sources of income--welfare and the street economy--become more appealing. Alternative sources of gratification also become appealing. The street life, violence, drugs, early sex, and having babies are among these.

Some analysts argue that youth are victims of historical changes in the social context of adolescence. Sexual maturity occurs earlier than it did 50 years ago, but the assumption of adult roles is expected to follow a lengthy adolescence to gain knowledge, skills, and cognitive and social maturity. A frequent theme in writings on adolescence is the stresses that accrue when youth have no meaningful role in adult society (Gold & Petronio, 1980). Campbell (1969, p. 824) stated the point eloquently, "How can a meaningful identity develop among those who possess only the shadow of significance and usefulness?" Coleman and his colleagues on the President's Science Advisory Committee (1974) decried the lack of opportunities for youth to gain experiences necessary for adulthood, such as exercising authority over matters that affect other persons and demonstrating dependability in carrying out productive tasks.

More recently, Colemen and Husen (1985) and others have described broad social trends in industrialized countries that make the transition to adulthood

difficult. The most important are connected to the ways socializing institutions are organized and operated:

- The family's role in providing children with "social capital" has declined. No other institutions have fully replaced the family's function of providing the "norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children" that in turn provide children with the "attitudes, effort, and concept of self" needed to benefit from the "opportunities, demands and rewards" of schools and workplace. (Coleman, 1987, pp. 36, 38).

- Youths' contact with adults is fragmented. Each socializing institution--family, schools, social and community agencies and workplaces--has its own sphere of influence. Their goals may be contradictory. They may present youth with differing expectations about appropriate roles.

- Thus society fails to present youth with coherent messages. Yet identity formation requires "a stable social context" where significant people define and support an emerging identity. Conflict can arise when situations and roles are weakly or ambiguously defined (Cottrell, 1969, p. 551).

- Agencies dealing with young people are increasingly large, bureaucratic, and impersonal. Because schools have become so large, they have been forced to formalize social control. Disciplining students often becomes a matter of defining and enforcing rules rather than a matter of exercising informal control on a one-to-one basis.

- Society is increasingly meritocratic and credential-ridden. School emphasizes marks and tests as instruments of sorting out who is qualified to be first on line for the best jobs. Because employment has become more formalized, youth are less able to find occasional jobs through family and friends. Because the fixed costs of employment have risen, employers want to hire people with established work histories.

- Jobs available to youth have been affected by conditions not only beyond the control of youth but also beyond the control of employers. Forces beyond our borders influence the labor market.

- The opportunities for deviant behavior have increased. Alcohol, drugs, and guns are widely available. In urban areas the existence of large unsupervised and unlit buildings such as public housing may invite vandalism (Clark, 1985; Rutter, 1980).

Discussion of Traditional Explanations

Assertions about the culture of poverty have always been controversial. In a society that believes that people with talent and industry can succeed despite their

backgrounds, the notion of a culture of poverty seems unnecessarily deterministic. It blames the victim (Ryan, 1976), and, when it disparages minority child rearing, smacks of racism. Critics contend that the notion of a culture of poverty neglects the functional aspects of many of the so-called cultural attitudes and behavior (Hamburg, 1986; Kohn, 1977; Ogbu, 1981; Stack, 1974). For example, Ogbu argues that the child rearing practices of ghetto parents are adaptive because they reflect a realistic view of the competencies needed for adult survival. Hamburg (1986) argues that it is adaptive for young women to have their babies in their teens when the labor market is inhospitable to youth. By 30 the women have finished with child rearing and can get on with their lives.

Furthermore, social scientists challenge basic tenets of the "individual" explanation: (1) that children's early experiences have durable effects and (2) that a culture of poverty exists that perpetuates itself, even when the conditions that gave rise to it change. The research reviewed below provides evidence for the plasticity of human beings and questions both the existence of a separate culture of poverty and the inevitability of intergenerational cultural transmission.

Reversibility of Early Learning

Jerome Kagan (1979) is among the social scientists who doubt that early experiences necessarily cause permanent damage. Acknowledging that the family has unquestionable influence on children's development, Kagan points out that the influence is stable, and we do not know if it is greater in the early or in later years of childhood. Rutter (1980) reached a similar conclusion after reviewing the well-documented relationships between adverse family experiences and adolescent delinquency, psychological disturbance, and school drop out. The relationships are more likely to occur when (1) adverse early circumstances persist and are confirmed by experiences outside the family and (2) children encounter two or more major

stresses such as parental discord and parental loss.

Several studies with animals have demonstrated how the effects of early experiences could be offset by later experiences. For example, researchers altered the behavior of a macque monkey reared in isolation by placing it with a younger monkey. In follow-up studies, children who had suffered severe deprivation had made remarkable progress in favorable environments such as adopted homes.

Kagan conducted research in Guatamalan villages with isolated and poorly nourished infants who are retarded developmentally in comparison with American children of the same age. After infancy, the same children's lives change; they go outside to play and at age eight are given adult responsibilities. By adolescence they perform as well as American children (Kagan, 1979; Hobbs & Robinson, 1982).

Surprisingly, other evidence that minimizes the durability of early cultural learning can be found in anthropology. An example is Hart's (1963) study of primitive societies. Hart points to the relative leeway such societies give to child-rearing practices, in contrast to the "degree of standardization and correctness" they require of post-pubertal education (p. 406), which occurs outside the family. At puberty the child is removed from the familiar and "life ... becomes real and earnest as the initiate is required to 'put away the things of a child'" at schools where he learns about his cultural heritage. When they encounter modern cultures, adults from primitive societies are willing to give up that part of their way of life learned early, such as the use of a tool, but are less willing to replace beliefs learned in initiation school.

Evidence that learning continues throughout life is often the work of life span theorists (e.g., Baltes & Schaie, 1976; Brim & Kagan, 1980), who are strong believers in the capacity of the human organism to continue learning and changing. They "presuppose" plasticity (Lerner, 1984), contending that human beings have an

epigenetic capacity to change throughout their lifetimes. "Human beings are unlikely to be permanently misshapen by transient experiences. ... [They are capable of being] resilient and responsive to the advantages their environments provide" (Scarr, 1982, p. 853). An example comes from the research that distinguishes two types of intelligence. While, one, the mechanic (information processing and memory), peaks by the end of adolescence (age 25), the other, pragmatic intelligence (knowledge, expertise, and wisdom), continues to develop (Baltes, 1987).

On the basis of their findings in a small but powerful experiment in helping anti-social adolescents, Massimo and Shore (1973) concluded that adolescence is "a period of reintegration and restructuring, a time when changes may have major significance for later life." The experiment involved the therapeutic intervention by one practitioner in a crisis point of 10 young men with records of anti-social behavior when they had been expelled from school. The practitioner helped the youths obtain employment that matched their interests and abilities, and when jobs catalyzed the need, he encouraged remedial education and psychotherapy. The practitioner was always available to help. To foster growth of the young men's independence and initiative, all parts of the program were voluntary.

When the practitioner's involvement ended after 10 months, the group was noticeably improved, in comparison to a control group. Seven out of 10 were employed, and the other three back in school. Their self-concepts were better. They had less need to act aggressively, and they were in less trouble with the law (Massimo & Shore, 1963, 1977).

After five years, the treated group continued to show progress while the control group deteriorated despite contacts with formal rehabilitation agencies. Most of the treated group had obtained more schooling, usually outside established channels, and they had settled into careers. The unemployment of the controls was

associated with legal difficulties; when employed, they had low status jobs (Massimo & Shore, 1969). In a ten-year follow-up (Massimo & Shore, 1973), only two of the treated group had failed. Of the other eight some had done remarkably, in terms of job and marital stability, income, and avoidance of legal problems. In contrast, only two of the control group had adjusted, and neither very well.

Adaptability

Research also challenges the belief that cultural background prevents people from adapting to new circumstances. In their study of Minominee Indians, anthropologists George and Louise Spindler (1957) identified exceptional circumstances where American Indians were able to change in response to requirements for economic success. Like the ghetto black, the American Indian is often portrayed as unable to adapt to the demands of the modern economy because of dysfunctional tribal beliefs and modes of living. The Spindlers cite anthropological evidence, that, at varying levels of acculturation to the modern world, Indians do in fact maintain a world view and psychological structure that is congruent with the aboriginal mode of life.

The Spindlers found exceptions among some Menominee Indians working in an Indian-owned and managed lumber industry. Those who had obtained high status occupational and social positions comparable to those in white towns exhibited reformulated personalities in adaptation to the demands of middle class status achievement. The authors argue that such psychological change can occur only in the presence of clear-cut and meaningful rewards--"when the barriers to achievement on the white man's terms are broken down." Without such rewards the traditional psychological structure "will block out whole areas of the new cultural environment and make possible the learning of only limited techniques of white culture as necessary accessories to getting along in today's world" (p. 406).

When Inkeles and Smith (1974) set out to demonstrate how individuals in developing countries become modern, one of their "hidden agendas" was to "challenge those psychologists ... who assume that everything important in the development of the personality has happened by the age of six, and certainly by the age of sixteen." They also demonstrated that persons reared in traditional cultures can adapt to the requirements of modern culture. Becoming modern involves "social aspects of the personality ... which [they contend] can and do change after childhood and indeed after adolescence." The authors acknowledge that "movement [to modernity], from a sense of inadequacy to a feeling of personal efficacy, from rigidity to flexibility, from narrowness to cognitive openness, from suspicion to trust, from ignorance to knowledge, is the exception rather than the rule." Yet their research was able to show that such changes take place under "the right circumstances, stimulus, and social support" (pp. 9-10).

Young men's exposure to the mass media, attendance at school, and employment in a modern factory provided such ideal conditions. Young men changed by "incorporating the norms implicit in such organizations into their own personality" (p. 307). Much of the influence of modernizing institutions comes from "reward and punishment, modeling, exemplifications and generalization" (p. 140), strict rules and procedures, and strong sentiments of group solidarity (p. 365). For example, when the young men mastered required skills, they developed a greater sense of efficacy and their behavior became increasingly competent. The men incorporated the schools' practices, such as schedules and working by a plan. They also imitated the characteristics of powerful persons in the school, such as openness to new ideas. Apparently, the modernizing institutions offered both social capital (see Coleman, 1987, above) and opportunities and incentives to change.

In Western society, Rutter and his associates (1979) have also shown how

schools with certain characteristics can influence young people in desirable ways. These schools are better able than other schools to foster academic success and good behavior in young people with similar disadvantages. The environments of the more effective schools were characterized by clear goals and by positive values and norms that promoted cohesion and student acceptance. The student body included children of varying intellectual ability, thus reducing the likelihood that anti-authority and anti-academic cultures would form. The schools were generous in their use of rewards and praise. They had "an atmosphere of confidence that pupils could and would succeed in the tasks that were set" (Rutter, 1980, p. 169). Teachers and students were allowed chances to be responsible for the school, and teachers were skillful group managers.

Research on the influence of situations on behavior has bearing on the issue of adaptability. Some social psychologists contend that behavior is affected at least as much by the particular situations in which individuals are acting as by their developmental history or personality. For example, the structure of interaction in a particular setting can take on a life of its own and "determine whether the interactions are cohesive or disruptive in character" (Rutter, 1980, p. 179). Social role expectations, particularly in institutional settings such as prisons, the armed services, large high schools, and corporations that have powerful rewards and punishments, can cause people to behave contrary to their values and self-concept (Haney & Zimbardo, 1976). "Highly structured, norm-regulated" and goal-directed situations are most likely to have such influence (Pervin, 1985, p. 80). More generally, the demands and reinforcers of extra-familial institutions (schools, courts of law, the police) and specific settings in which people find themselves are seen as having a decisive influence on behavior.

Socialization Practices

Parents can and do adapt their child rearing methods to prepare their children for life in societies with changed requirements for economic success and political survival. When Inkeles (1955) was associated with the Harvard Russian Research Center, he compared the child rearing values that former Soviet citizens brought up in Tsarist times remembered as guiding the way their parents reared them with the child-rearing values they followed in raising their own children after the Russian Revolution. Inkeles found a marked effect of social change on child-rearing patterns. In the Revolutionary generation, secular morality had substantially replaced traditional religious values. In their choices of occupations for their children, parents were more likely to consider political realities and the children's choices rather than family traditions. The Soviet parenting generation also emphasized personality qualities "as ends in themselves rather than as means to the attainment of the good life lived ... 'in the sight of God.'"

Beatrice Whiting (1977) also found evidence of change in child rearing in Kenya where parents know that education is now the pathway for jobs. In order to pay for education, fathers seek jobs that pay wages rather than maintain their agricultural role, and they forego polygamous marriages to reduce the number of children necessary for them to educate. Parents who used to value generosity and good-heartedness in their children now value curiosity, cleverness, and autonomy, qualities necessary for success in school. Educated urban mothers self-consciously adopt Western child-rearing practices learned in psychology courses and make their homes child-centered. Formerly children had many responsibilities and were expected to show deference to their elders.

Cultural Transmission

Some critics doubt the existence of a distinct culture in our society,

contending that lower class people hold the values of the majority, but adjust them to deprived circumstances. Liebow (1967) referred to this alternative system as "derivative, insubstantial, and concurring like a shadow with society's values." There is little or no evidence of social class difference in present time orientation, in the ability to defer gratification (Miller, Reissman, & Seagull, 1965; Gecas, 1979), or in cognitive capacity. Critics also claim that many findings of class differences are ecologically invalid, artifacts of the research situation. Differences among the lower class in feelings of efficacy, locus of control, and need for achievement are likely "an accurate assessment of their life chances" (Gecas, 1979, p. 353).

Other critics of the culture of poverty thesis contend that the behavior of impoverished youth represents an adaptation to pernicious conditions facing them and their families anew each generation, rather than an internalization of cultural patterns. Growing children's experiences affect first their aspirations and then their choices about friends, school, and work. These adaptations may resemble a culture of poverty, but the process by which they occur is thought to be different.

Poor children grow up experiencing the consequences of their parents' low status and powerlessness. Family income is inadequate and unpredictable. Preoccupation with survival also leaves parents, usually single mothers, little time to provide consistent and effective supervision.

When they go to school, poor and minority children find that teachers expect them to achieve less. Teachers may organize their classrooms on the basis of "spontaneous ascription" to the benefit of privileged children and often without reference to rational criteria (Papagiannis, Bickel & Fuller, 1983).

In secondary school, these youths are often tracked into closely supervised courses and assigned routine work without substantive complexity. The effect is to vitiate self-reliance and promote fatalism. Such youths are less likely to take

advantage of opportunities (Davis, 1986). They are also unlikely to learn to take initiative and to think abstractly, to develop skills necessary for higher status jobs (Hamilton & Claus, 1981).

The cumulative experiences in family and school cause young people to limit their aspirations when they conclude that few opportunities are available to people like them (DeLone, 1979; Kagan, 1977). To explain this process, some scholars draw on work by Emile Durkheim (1951) and Robert Merton (1968) about what occurs when a group believes itself barred from accomplishing societally approved goals through legitimate means. These scholars describe how lower class youth adapt when they discover the disparity between what they are led to want in our society, success in school and work, and what is actually available to them (Rainwater, 1970; Figueria-McDonough, 1983). Some youths no longer try to achieve the goals and even abandon adherence to them. One must feel efficacious and hopeful for "planning, forbearance, and effort [to be] ... rational" (Smith, 1969).

These young people may fail to gain the necessary skills and credentials to obtain and succeed at work (Anderson, 1980; Obgu, 1974; Liebow, 1967). The process can be subtle: Such youth may attend only to that knowledge they view as usable and have difficulty acquiring knowledge that assumes an individual has control over his life (Seeman, 1971). And learning theorists are increasingly becoming aware of the effects of what people already know on how and what they are able to perceive, problem solve, imagine, and learn (Chi & Rees, 1983).

Youths' lack of motivation or opportunity to achieve in conventional routes can result in "alternate elaboration" of intellectual abilities required in settings where they can succeed (Elkind, 1973, p. 75). Elkind also suggests that young people's mental abilities can become "prematurely structured" when responsibilities for family care and survival prevent them from "playing" with their mental abilities.

Some youths may respond to the frustration about meeting societally approved goals by adopting deviant identities. Males may engage in illicit activity; females may give birth to illegitimate children. Or young people may take on expressive identities with anti-social components, such as those observed by Rainwater (1970) in a low-income black ghetto; here young people manipulate relationships in a peer group through a variety of dramatic presentations and non-rational activities (sexual exploits, substance abuse, hustling, gambling, stealing, selling drugs, and fighting). A parallel explanation (Kaplan, 1980) relates youths' failure to meet their need for self-esteem with their experimentation with deviant behavior to gain self-esteem. In any event, behavior promoted by street and peer cultures makes young people even more unacceptable to schools and employers.

It is possible, then, to marshall considerable evidence to challenge explanations focusing on the deficits of young people having trouble assuming expected adult roles. Proponents contend that many of these shortcomings result from socialization in families either immured in a subculture of poverty or otherwise dysfunctional. This socialization is thought to have durable effects. As we have seen, such explanations are vulnerable because of the growing evidence of (1) the capacity of the human organism to learn throughout life; (2) the capacity of both parents and offspring from traditional cultures to adapt to the demands of modern society; and (3) the role of the social structure in blighting young people's aspirations and curtailing their opportunities to learn, work, and form families.

However, we cannot dismiss these explanation entirely in favor of environmental explanations. Inherited attributes do influence how children respond to their environments and how their environments respond to them (Pervin, 1984; Lerner, 1984; Scarr & McCartney, 1983). And, while it is unlikely that children from poor families are inoculated for failure by the time they reach school, the

behavior and attitudes learned from family, neighbors, and peers throughout childhood clearly have an impact. "Patterns of disadvantage and failure tend to persist once established" (Rutter, 1980, p. 244).

Current thought views the individual life course as a complex interaction among inherited attributes (genotypes); developmental exigencies; upbringing; individual goals, plans, and choices (Runyan, 1982, p. 102); situations encountered; the economic, social, and political context; and chance occurrences (Bandura, 1982). Life span researchers, for example, study the impact of age-graded influences with fairly predictable onset and duration, like maturation and socialization events; historical events, such as war, depression, and long-term changes (modernity, quality of health care, characteristics of the workplace, and pervasiveness of the media); and significant life events, such as divorce, death of a child, unemployment, whose timing and characteristics are specific to individuals.

Some examples of research and theory examining interactions of these various factors will serve to illustrate this approach.

Recent research on the function of genotypes for the life course views genes as determining a range of possible responses in interaction with the environment (Pervin, 1984). Genetic make-up is seen as facilitating or interfering with an organism's adaptability, depending on the nature of these interactions.

One theme of this research is the epigenetic capacity of people to change in interaction with their environment. For example, Scarr and McCartney (1983) argue that people's genotypes determine their responsiveness to environmental opportunities and the way the environment affects them. People act on their environment to produce novel rather than predetermined outcomes. Individuals can select the contexts they choose to act in (Bandura, 1983) and can change those they encounter (Lerner, 1984). An adolescent is seen as "a constructive actor in creating

new situations to explore his own capacities to survive and develop" (Livson & Peskin, 1980, p. 71). Adolescents influence their own development by the way they react to what happens to them--because of their stage of cognitive development, for example, or because of such inherited attributes as sex, body type, facial attractiveness, and response thresholds (Lerner, 1984; Lerner & Foch, 1987). Because reciprocal relationships exist between individual and contextual processes, these researchers believe that "potential for change exists across life" (Lerner, 1984, p. 20).

Some psychologists argue that along with an epigenetic capacity to change, human beings have a developed capacity to change in response to contextual requirements. One dimension of developed flexibility is "ego resiliency" (Block & Block, 1980) or the capacity to regulate the expression of impulses, feelings, and desires and to invoke appropriate problem-solving strategies depending on circumstantial demands. An ego-resilient person is able to adapt his behavior in stressful, ambiguous, frustrating and conflictual situations. Another dimension of developed plasticity is the ability to meet developmental challenges (Sroufe, 1979). The degree to which individuals have a flexible behavioral repertoire depends on their life experiences, including family upbringing, and perhaps on genetic and constitutional factors as well (Block & Block, 1980).

Individuals with developed plasticity can play a strong role in their own development by selecting and shaping the context in which they choose to act and which in turn affects them. Thus "the development of flexibility is marked by the development of efficacy in self-regulation" (Lerner, 1984, p. 12). The question becomes, then, not whether human beings are resilient, but under what circumstances their resiliency can be maximized.

Life span theorists point out that occurrences of certain life events are beyond

the control of individuals. Both earlier choices (age of child bearing, size of family, education, occupation) and life events (hardship, single-parenthood) leave "a durable [but varying] imprint on the course that follows." "The lifetime effects of ordinary events and turning points" on particular individuals

> "cannot be appraised without taking to account...: (1) the nature of the event or transition, its severity, duration, and so on; (2) the resources, beliefs, and experiences people bring to the situation; (3) how the situation or event is defined; and (4) resulting lines of adaptation as chosen from available alternatives (Elder, 1985, p. 35).

Choices that people make after an event, such as adolescent child bearing, rather than the event itself, determine the event's long-term impact on the life course.

In a longitudinal study of Hawaiian children at risk for delinquency, Werner and Smith (1982) identifed constitutional and environmental factors that appeared to make children vulnerable or resilient. The children in the sample were exposed before the age of two to risk factors such as poverty, perinatal stress, family stress, and a mother without high school education.

Resilient children were found to have few learning, health, or behavioral problems and no contacts with the courts. Two types of factors appeared to insulate the resilient children from delinquency:

(1) Factors within the children -- resilient children tended to be first born. They were less sickly. Mothers described infants in positive terms as very active, "cuddly," "easy to deal with." They were notably autonomous and socially oriented, and their overall development was on time. As adolescents the resilient group had higher verbal skills, greater locus of control, and higher self-esteem. They were more responsible and nurturant.

(2) Factors in the care-giving environment -- two years between siblings and fewer than four children in the family, the availability of caretakers, the quality and amount of attention the child received as an infant by the primary caretaker,

rule enforcement in adolescence, and the "presence of an informal multi-generational network of kin and friends, including neighbors, teachers, and ministers." Boys did better when an adult male was available to provide rules and structure; girls did better when they had a positive relationship with their mother and other women as "support and models." Surprisingly, girls did better when father absence and mother employment gave them "greater autonomy and competence," including care of younger children (Werner, 1987, pp. 29-30. This last finding parallels those of Elder, 1974, above).

The absence of strong emotional support was more problemmatic for children with constitutional predispositions to withdrawal, passivity, and irregular sleeping and eating habits. Not only are some children able to elicit more positive responses from rearing environments; some environments offer more. It is the "joint impact of constitutional vulnerabilties and early family instablity" that leads to serious delinquency in both poor and middle class children (Werner, 1987, p. 40). Werner quotes Sameroff (1983, p. 12) in concluding, "The development of a child appears to be multi-determined by what the child brings to the situation, what s/he elicits from the situation, what environment can offer, and what it does offer."

Other research supports this conclusion. Spivack and Cianci (1987), for example, argue that temperamentally "difficult" children are particularly at risk because maternal rejection may lead to acting out and aggression. Such behavior in turn will interfere with their being able to adapt to the school's behavioral expectations. This pattern of negative interactions prevents the formation of social bonds and undermines further socialization.

Caspi and his colleagues (1987) report the persistence of maladapative behavior -- temper tantrums -- that results from the inability to handle frustration. What seems to happen is a special case of individuals' dispositions selecting them into

settings that reinforce their dispositions (see also Scarr & McCartney, 1983). Explosive behavior in frustrating circumstances, such as school, may lead a young man to drop out of school, thereby increasing the likelihood that his life will continue to be frustrating, in terms of finding rewarding work and making a decent living. The "maladaptive behaviors increasingly channel [young people] into environments that perpetuate those behaviors; [the behaviors] are sustained by the progressive accumulation of their own consequences." In addition, specific "interactional styles," are learned when the person acts, others react, and the person reacts back in a manner that provides him with short-term pay-off. Because this style "evokes reciprocal, maintaining responses from others" it continues over time (Caspi, Elder, & Bem, 1987, p. 308-309). (This finding parallels Cottrell, 1969, above.)

A recent study of the antecedents of urban violence demonstrates another type of complex interaction between economic context (job availability), family structure, and social control. Sampson (1987) challenges two "cultural" explanations. One is the subculture of violence theory that the value system of inner cities condones and legitimizes violence; if a community is organized for crime, according to this theory, pressures and opportunities exist for engaging in illegal means to obtain goals. The other explanation blames aspects of poor black culture for family disruptions and the labor market marginality of black men.

Sampson's research demonstrated that in a particular city the highest predictor of marital disruption (defined as families headed by women) is the proportion of unemployed men in the city, and the greatest predictor of juvenile homicide and robbery rates, independent of income, is family disruption. Family structure serves to mediate the effects of economic factors. These associations held for black and white samples.

Sampson draws on other research in conjecturing that the connection between single-parent families and violence is a function of weaker social control in communities dominated by such families. Not only does one parent have more difficulty supervising and serving as a guardian of her children and property (and her neighbors' children and property). One-parent families are also less likely to participate in recreational, educational, and political organizations that link youths to wider social institutions and foster desired values (Dornbusch et al, 1985; Loeber, 1982).

Research on inner city youth not cited by Sampson (Freeman & Holzer, 1985) suggests additional explanations. Single parents are less likely to work; more likely to depend on welfare and live in public housing. For reasons that are not clear, youths from such families do far less well in the labor market than do youths from families with comparable income and other attributes. Youths from single-parent families may lack an adequate work ethic or have limited access to information about jobs; or they may encounter "stratified opportunity structures"--that is, limited educational and work opportunities tied to family status (Schiller, 1970). In any event, many young inner city blacks find crime more appealing than working.

In another multi-dimensional investigation of youth problems, Ianni (1983) used community ethnography and psychodynamic interviews to study how adolescents learn to use societal rules about expected behavior, which structure their transition to adulthood. Through learning these rules in interaction with their environment, young people, according to Ianni, develop a unique and useful sense of self (identity) and learn to regulate their own behavior.

Ianni picks up a familiar theme: youth in much of the modern world receive ambiguous signals about these rules. "Disarray [exists] in the socialization matrix for adolescence" (p. 67). This is particularly a problem in the inner city where the

school, youth agencies, the justice system, families, and employers have different prerogatives. Peers and media advocate present-oriented values antagonistic to family goals. Socializing institutions present inconsistent messages about what behavior is valued, and they compete for primacy in socialization. For example, each has a different explanation about why youth are unemployed or delinquent, each institution tending to blame other ones. Some agency professionals believe that young people lack a work ethic. Employers doubt the capacity of many youths to learn. The police think the youths are deviant and use the courts to deal with troublesome behavior.

Ianni contrasts this situation with a suburban community he studied where family, school, and community promote similar goals and values. When a child gets in trouble, he is not treated as a deviant to be dealt with through the courts, but is seen as a community responsibility in need of resocialization.

Ianni found that inner city youth confronted with such inconsistency may act out or engage in defeatist behavior. Those who make it may have more ego strength then most or have experience with one "good" institution--a caring school, a strongly supportive family, or peers. Ianni argues that when young people are inadequately socialized in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills that define adulthood, they fail to develop internal moral control.

Family and other social institutions must stress individual responsibility and self-evaluation, they must reward moral and legal behavior, and they must communicate consistent expectations. If young people become attached to the adults that represent the social order (beginning in the family), they are able to commit themselves to educational and occupational goals and to the rules and laws of society. When they care about the wishes and expectations of other people who support moral law and order, they have a stake in conforming. They are not free

to deviate. They are less likely to associate with anti-social peers.

These conclusions are consistent with recent theorizing about the antecedents of juvenile delinquency (Elliott, Huizinga, Ageton, 1985; Hirschi, 1969). Hawkins and Lam (1987, p. 243), for example, believe that youths form social bonds when they have opportunities for involvement with others in activities within a family, at school, and with peers; when they acquire the skills to perform as expected in these settings; and when they rewarded for their competent performance.

Wahlage and his colleagues (1982, 1986) take a similar position in stressing the importance of giving youth an opportunity for successful involvement in roles that promote social bonding to conventional norms and behavior. Particularly important are experiences that reinforce norms of reciprocity, individual responsibility, and recognition of the legitimate rights and interests of others. Wahlage and his associates also emphasize the need for marginal high school students to develop two kinds of skills: coping skills -- self-management (control of aggression), ability to reconcile conflicting demands, adaptation to authority--and cognitive skills--abstract thinking, problem solving, and flexibility.

The authors recommend that programs for such students include what they call experiential education, which combines conventional subject matter with activities outside the school. Community service, political and social action, and outdoor adventures are examples. Such activities put students in new roles and provide them with opportunities to study social issues and to be of service to others. They are able to interact with people different in ages and background, including people who are successful. Outside activities give youths a chance for engagement in problematic situations where they can use their own ideas and try out new skills. Such activities give students with a poor history of academic performance a chance to demonstrate competence.

Lessons from Research

An important caveat about policy implications should be mentioned. Lessons must be framed in terms of their implications for small-scale experiments. It is ironic that, while the environmental explanation reflects greater optimism about the ability of individuals to change once the social structure becomes more hospitable, adopting policies that modify environmental constraints is seen as much more difficult than adopting policies that attempt to "fix" people. Our society presently lacks the capacity to undertake fundamental social and economic reform. Commitment to the market economy makes some solutions, such as guaranteed full employment or reform of secondary labor markets, unacceptable to legislators and possibly to the electorate. Even if we were willing, social knowledge provides inadequate guidance. And in the near future, federal money, even for early childhood or other remediation efforts, will reach only a fraction of young people at risk.

With these constraints in mind, let us see what lessons can be derived.

First, no one factor -- inherited traits, upbringing, or the "environment"-- alone accounts for the difficulties youth have in taking on adult roles. Young people who drop out of school, break laws, have babies but don't marry, fail to prepare themselves for work and remain subemployed have likely experienced many failures and adversities. Many are unable to achieve instrumental identities because they lack adult models, they have doubts about their abilities and life chances, and they have weak bonds to conventional associates and mainstream institutions. The family, school, social agencies, and employers fail youth in different ways. Solutions that neglect either personal or environmental factors are doomed to fail.

Second, personal attributes -- drive, knowledge, skills, and choices -- are important. But attributes are affected by experiences and opportunities, and

outside agents such as schools can help develop them.

Third, human beings have an in-born and developed capacity to change throughout life. They can influence their own development. However, childhood adversities that persist in adolescence and are confirmed by other experiences are likely to be very damaging. Poverty is particularly harmful. Family disruption and conflict, often associated with low income, is related to school failure, psychological problems, and delinquency. Caring relationships, with standards for behavior and achievement, often fall by the wayside.

Third, overcoming the consequences of earlier adversities may be difficult. However, some circumstances appear to promote resilience and adaptability. They help young people take on adult roles successfully. These circumstances have the following characteristics:

- Consistent messages about adult role expectations
- Opportunity to gain knowledge and master skills necessary for adult roles
- Opportunities to succeed within "clear, demanding, but attainable expectations" for performance (Wehlege & Rutter, 1986, p. 391)
- Structure: clear rules and standards for behavior
- Meaningful rewards and reinforcements
- Clear consequences for failure to meet expectations
- Involvement with caring adults and prosocial peers
- Group solidarity in support of conventional values and goals
- Promotion of bonds to mainstream institutions
- Powerful and respected role models
- Work opportunities that promote self-respect and self-sufficiency.

There is good reason to believe that adolescence is an opportune time for

interventions. Experts tell us it is a time of cognitive and psychological restructuring when young people's adaptive resources become crucial. Adolescents need to gain independence and to acquire an integrated identity. They make important choices about acquiring knowledge and skills, making a living, and forming personal ties. In doing so it is important for them to gain confidence in their capacity to perform socially confirmed roles. The choices young people make and the opportunities they encounter will have dramatic consequences for their life courses.

Young people need help in accomplishing the tasks of adolescence. Fortunately, research and theory offer us some guidance here: During adolescence youth appear to be responsive to structured, norm-regulated cultures. They may encounter these cultures in the family, at school, among peers, or in the community (preferably all four), but there young people should find clearcut expectations, meaningful rewards, and chances to learn skills and play responsible roles valued by the culture. People who care about what happens to these young people are an essential component.

The socialization of adolescents in primitive societies was successful because it had these qualities (Hart, 1963). Ianni (1983) found that the transition to adulthood is much easier in small communities with a stake in youths' success and consistent rules about expected behavior. Research on effective schools and workplaces (e.g., Rutter et al., 1979; Inkeles & Smith, 1974) is suggestive, as is the work of Davis (1986) and Hamilton and Claus (1981) about the consequences of ineffective schooling. But as Elder (1974) and Werner and Smith (1982) learned, even adolescents in deprived families can flourish if they have a chance to play adult roles in a context of emotional support and structure.

These ideas are not easy to implement. They could require massive institutional reform. For example, rewards are not just pats on the back. Young

people must believe that they will find jobs that allow them to count on a future playing roles sanctioned by society.

Notes

Writers working outside the psychoanalytic tradition may portray the self as more fluid. For example, some interactionists see the self as more a process than an entity, existing "only through the appropriate defining responses of others" (Cottrell, 1969). Identities are seen as varying from role to role, and context to context, according to individuals' perceptions of the situations and their roles.

A recent study argues that many jobs available to impoverished high-risk youth, while poor overall, have "one or a few good features" such as fringe benefits, union membership, and opportunity to learn at least some new skills (Friedman & Friedman, 1986).

A term that includes unemployed, underemployed, underpaid, and discouraged workers (Gordon, 1972).

The authors also tested the relationship between the level of modernity the subjects were exposed to as children with their modernity scores as adults. They found that "men who remember their parents and teachers as having adopted a more modern approach to child rearing seemed to enjoy no lasting benefits in the form of a higher level of individual modernity" (p. 238). Thus, extra-familial experiences had more impact than family experiences on the men's becoming modern.

This view is supported by theorists of intergenerational transmission, who point out that parents and children have similar values because they have concurrent experiences (Bengston & Troll, 1978).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) presents a similar model of how multiple layers of the environment act on the developing person.

A study of delinquents in grades 7 through 10 by Patterson and his associates (1984) lends support to these conjectures. The study found strong associations between delinquency and disruption in family management practices: Parents of delinquent teenagers were "indifferent trackers" of their children's whereabouts, associates, and activities, and they failed to provide effective punishments for misbehavior, such as loss of privileges. The disruptions were much more likely in broken homes and in families where parents were in conflict.

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Biographical Sketch

Sarah Gideonse is a consultant on youth and family issues, specializing in policy analysis and research. She received a master's degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and an interdisciplinary doctorate in child and family policy from the University of Cincinnati. Formerly a grants manager for research and development institutions at the U.S. Office of Education in Washington, more recently Dr. Gideonse has worked on evaluations of an alternative school program, daycare centers, and a program for teen-age parents in Cincinnati. She has just completed a needs assessment for Cincinnati's Human Services Division and Community Action Agency. Dr. Gideonse writes on welfare and youth topics and is co-editor of Women in the Workplace: Effects on Families (1984).

A COMMENTARY

on Sarah Gideonese's

DETERMINANTS OF YOUTH'S SUCCESSFUL ENTRY INTO ADULTHOOD

by David F. Ricks

I applaud Dr. Gideonse's optimism and wish that I could share it. My experience with young people, ranging from delinquents and drop-outs to college students, supports much of what she says, but my sense of their prospects is bleaker than hers.

A quick place to put one's hand on the pulse of youth is the local comedy club. I have been horrified recently by a consistent observation. Comedians range experimentally over a set of topics--events in campaigns, the stock market and insider trading, TV commercials and programs, celebrities, sex, parents, landlords, and so on. Young audiences meet political jokes with stony silence. Comments about presidential candidates elicit silence from some, angry sounds from others. Comments about the stock market crash evoke no interest. But when the comedian moves on to television programs, television and movie celebrities, and even television commercials, the audience begins to laugh, clap, and roar out approval. To Boston young people, in a comedy club almost surrounded by Harvard College, the world of television appears to be more real than the world of politics, business, and foreign policy.

When I have occasionally accepted invitations to appear on television, I found my authority with my students enhanced. I am no longer surprised that so many people voted for an actor for President and accepted a role playing, "picture opportunity" approach to presidential duties. We have inadvertently raised huge numbers of people who are capable of being passively entertained, but who cannot

participate actively in their world. They live vicariously, not directly. Like the occupants of Plato's cave, they mistake images on a screen for reality. Entry into adulthood is not easy for spectators.

In commenting on Dr. Gideonse's paper, I want to record first some indications that young people in our society are in trouble. Then I question the main structural premise of the paper, that we can approach youth problems either as the characteristics of individuals or as the products of society, arguing instead that widespread individual deficits are to social failure what the pulse rate is to the damaged heart, a surface indicator. I will argue for some ways in which young people, including some who are often seen as social failures, are doing better than we adults are. This leads to some comments on the economies and cultures of youth, one of which is part of the "culture of poverty" with which this paper wrestles. Finally, I want to examine some of the structural impediments to success for young people. This leads me, in the end, to raise some questions about the society into which Dr. Gideonse and most adults are trying to socialize young people.

Every viable society recognizes two great transition points in life and develops ways of responding to people as they reach those points. The first, at about 5-7 years, recognizes the ability of the child to think in a new way that uses concepts and language for learning. The child is now ready for socialization into the folkways of the tribe, for formal instruction in reading and arithmetic, or in recognizing good pastures and when a cow is ready to be milked. The second great transition comes at about 12-15 and continues for some years. This is the movement from childhood to adult life, and like the first transition, it recognizes a person ready to think in a new way. Adolescents become able, mysteriously, to think in terms of mere possibilities, to form hypotheses, to see us, their elders, not just as

we are, but as we might have been or really should be. Adolescents become critics. Perhaps in response to this, we let them know that they are grown up now and ready to move out into the world of work and adult responsibility.

How well we help young people handle the tasks of learning their culture, and then participating in it, determines the quality of life they will have and will pass on to their offspring.

Right now, there is trouble with the way we are handling both transitions. Elementary schools are in trouble because we have been withdrawing economic support from education, except in a few communities such as Rochester, New York. In most areas, teachers make less money than firemen, policemen, sales people, or almost anyone else. A generation ago this hardly mattered to many young women, some of extraordinary ability. In I.Q. testing, grade school teachers were brighter, on the average, than high school teachers. Why? Because teaching was a first choice occupation for women, and grade school teachers were mainly women. High school teachers, mainly male, often taught as a second choice, after a preferred occupation became unavailable or after some vocational failure. But now bright young women are opting for nontraditional careers, designing computers, repairing retinas, and making deals that merge multinational companies. Most enjoy the change. Their new careers enrich hospitals and board rooms. But we are robbing the schools. Belatedly, we are beginning to raise salaries and to change credentialing so as to open up teaching careers to engineers and business people. Schools are in trouble, and the result is a generation of young people who reach adolescence minus much of the education that better schools could have given them.

A shortage of resources means that teachers work with large class sizes and have many non-teaching duties. A gradually growing sensitivity to social injustice has meant that schools work harder to keep all children in school for more years,

fighting to reduce dropouts and not resorting so quickly to expulsion of troubled kids. Teachers are expected to develop the sensitivity and resourcefulness to work with newly diverse classrooms. Most succeed, but each failure blights the futures of children.

Families have become less secure sources for learning. Children are likely to grow up for a time in a two parent family, then in a one parent household, then adapt to a re-constituted family. In their research on the effects of families on school achievement and drug use, Kellam and Ensminger (1983) have had to develop a classification of 38 major family patterns, modified by a large number of minor patterns. Few children today can follow adults about, as many once followed a farmer or small business owner parent, learning parental skills by daily observation and practice. Adult skills, if they are to be learned, must be analyzed and taught. We are not doing that very well.

Of the many indicators for failure, the one that has interested our society most has been the rising suicide rate in adolescents and young adults. Suicide passed homicide in 1981, becoming second only to accidents as a cause of death in young people. Suicide, which used to be shockingly high in old age, has dropped as pensions, social security, and prepaid medical care became available. It is still rising in the young, and if present trends continue, suicide in young people will be more frequent than suicide in old age by the turn of the century. A society can use suicide the way a physician uses temperature, as a generalized indicator that something is wrong. Clearly, something is very wrong in our system of social supports for young people.

Another indicator is the number of young people in jail. The proportion of young Americans in jail far exceeds the proportions in other economically advanced nations and is exceeded only by the proportions in Russia and South Africa. Many

jails hold three times the population for which they were built. The simple minded solution to this is to build more jails. More thoughtful people might profitably consider what we are doing that puts people on the path to jail. Contrast, for instance, the current shortages that exist in most skilled trades with the oversupply of jail inmates. Might this man in the cell (most are in their late teens or early twenties) be more use to himself and his society if we had managed to train him to build houses or program computers rather than to deal drugs?

While I agree with Dr. Gideonse that many young people face bleak futures, I have trouble with the ways in which she divides up the problem and searches for solutions. Her division of solutions into those that focus on the individual and those that look at the society is traditional and almost common sense. But I think it is misleading.

Consider a couple of representative problems, malnutrition and lead poisoning. Each can be seen every day in pediatrics wards, elementary schools, and city streets. But are they individual or social? Lead poisoning can be measured in the blood, bones, and teeth of individuals, and it can be seen in reading difficulties, frustration in school, early attempts to drop out, bullying of smaller children, and delinquency secondary to school failure. But lead poisoning is also a social problem: gasoline companies manufacture gasoline with lead in it, paint companies put lead in paint, toys and pewter pots have lead in them, landlords resist scraping and painting, real estate agents fail to warn buyers, etc. Jonathan Kozol (1988) describes how children of homeless people, assigned by city agencies to deteriorating hotels, are systematically poisoned by lead from peeling walls. Like private landlords, cities resist requests and even court orders to replace lead paint with less lethal wall coverings.

Malnourished children are slow learners, low in motivation, candidates for

failure. Each child, considered individually, is surely a social problem. But malnutrition is best understood as a failure in distributive justice. A society that spends billions to prop up farm prices, and billions more to store surplus food products, can hardly blame poor parents or poor children for the malnutrition and school failure they experience.

The most useful models for thinking about such problems come from public health work. Imagine that you are standing by the side of a rushing river and you see first one, then many bodies floating by. Some people are swimming, some are struggling, and some are drowned. You would probably try to rescue as many as you could. But eventually, you would probably try to find out what was causing them to fall into the river. Social conditions shape problems, which are then reflected in individual lives... some people learn to swim. If we see failure to get out of the home and into the society as a problem that develops within a social system, we open up new possibilities for intervention. Books such as Banfield's (1970) end by proposing only neglect, "benign neglect" in Moynihan's malignant phrase. We can do better than that if we take a more systematic viewpoint.

Denied housing, people sleep under bridges and on warm air exhaust grates. Denied access to jobs, they join an underground economy. This economy is fueled by the profits from drugs, theft, prostitution, and other crimes. It intersects in many ways with the world of "legitimate" business, e.g., the small town California or Kentucky hardware store, most of whose profits come from sales of "farm" equipment to marijuana growers, or the businessman who recruits a call girl to help entertain a valued customer. People who work with runaway children and adolescents are aware of how often these are "throwaway" kids, expelled from school, ignored or rejected by family, and not yet able to support themselves in standard jobs. There is a world of bus stations, drug deals, pimps, and untaxed

income awaiting them. Many fall easily into this world, and they find it hard to escape from it. Others use the underground economy to get a start, then move into legitimate work, just as the mafia moves from crime into owning restaurants, truck lines, and shipping. Most of the graduates of one drug program with which I have worked are now salesmen, using their finely tuned abilities at playing con games to sell class rings and other jewelry to people on the legitimate side of the economic tracks. I recently talked to a young man who had gotten his high school equivalency degree and B.A. in two and a half years, while working at a job half-time. He told me that when he was "hustling" he often worked 18 hour days. It was not hard to continue long work hours when he changed course and decided to get an education. People in the underground economy are invisible to most people who are not involved in law enforcement. We need to know a great deal more about this economy, this alternative culture (Stierlin, 1981) into which adolescents run when they run away from us. It is enormously destructive to many young people. Others move from a period of participation in this economy into jobs in business, politics, or the law. Many rich families began with a street peddler two or three generations back.

I do not see how we can reject Dr. Gideonse's main point, that many young people are at risk for failing to fulfill expected adult roles. Having done that, we are going to be pressed by our own guilt to "blame the victim" (Ryan, 1976). A better way to think about this is to take a public health approach: what are the risk factors and when do they start? Ramey (1978) has shown that failure in the first years of elementary school can be predicted for some children even before they are born. The risk factors are, as might be expected, a poorly educated adolescent mother, overwhelmed by poverty and childbearing, malnourished and under stress, who will produce a low birth weight, undernourished, damaged infant.

It is possible that the people who now crusade so fervently for the infant's right to life, if they knew the facts about infant damage, might crusade equally fervently for the child's right to a decent life after it is born. We clearly know enough now to improve maternal and infant nutrition, to train adolescents in responsible sex (whether through abstinence or use of birth control), and in infant care. All of these can reduce the risk of failure.

Dr. Gideonse provides an accurate and useful description of the tasks of male adolescence. It is awkward for a male reader to remind her that this template may not fit so well for female development. Women often show a pattern of continuing attachment and commitment to family in adolescence and adult life. This contrasts strongly with the male emphasis on separation and autonomy (Gilligan, 1982). Studying women has led me, and I think other men, to a new appreciation for the role of intimacy in identity formation for women... and when we looked again, for men.

Super and Jordan and their colleagues (1970) have shown that one way we worry about young people is unnecessary. They often flounder for some time after leaving school, making frequent horizontal job changes, and showing no progress. When I describe a young man who has had 7 jobs within a couple of years after leaving school at 18 to my classes or to clinicians, they often think his job moves are evidence for failure of commitment and ambition. Clinicians suggest the possibility of character disorder. But Super showed that this pattern is modal. It is how the world of work gets mapped out, possibilities explored, and bosses studied and accepted. The young man who once repaired my transmission is now vice president of a computer company.

Passive forms of identity are more worrisome. An active identity is built on skills and competence, "I can do that." Passive identities are the labels that we

wear. An active identity is the .750 average at the foul line, passive the Reeboks the adolescent wears on the court. Passive identities are not a new phenomenon--even the cowboy had his Stetson and his Levis--but the degree to which young people identify themselves by labels on the products they wear, consume, or drive seems to be reaching new heights. We are raising generations of consumers. Our old heroes were heroes of political achievement--Lincoln, Washington--business enterprise--Henry Ford--or scientific discovery--Edison, Fermi. The new heroes are those who are merely rich and famous, who consume more than others. A nation of consumers, running enormous international trade deficits, with an oppressive national debt, is not a good environment in which to learn how to work.

The poor are always with us? Yes, in some sense, but we are not always with them, in the sense of listening, understanding, and knowing their world as they know it. Despite Coles (1978), Kozol (ibid), and others who are good listeners, we do not know much about what makes people poor. Is there a self-perpetuating "culture of poverty"? Oscar Lewis once told me that he regretted ever coining the phrase. As he meant it, the culture of poverty was a set of attitudes that was adaptive in scarcity situations, and it had its own integrity. Passivity, a willingness to accept fate, and not hoping for too much could be adaptive when not much could be gained by hard work. The culture of poverty that Lewis saw in Mexico was not composed of people who were either stupid or inferior. The families he studied survived. Given the same resources, many of us would not. Gideonse quotes Elder's work, which shows that poverty can provide some people with early experiences of work, and with that work a feeling of making a contribution to the family, of early success, and of self-esteem. Kozol's (ibid) homeless families do not live in a self generated culture of poverty. Rather, they are victims of unemployment, high rents, fires, illness, and other catastrophes. They are not

passive, and they have not given up.

We do have to acculturate young people to the world of work. Whether this is the middle class young woman of 16 who calls her employer at the ice cream parlor and says she cannot come to work tonight because she has a date or the delinquent inner city kid who shows up at 10:00 for a 9:00 AM job, we have to teach the rhythms and routines of the work world to young people who march to different drummers. Gideonse cites Massimo's exemplary work in teaching school dropouts how to move into the work world. A comparable effort has been made by Project New Pride in Denver, socializing young men into the routines of work while teaching them work skills.

Are we still a "work ethic" society? In colonial America, when everyone was poor together, that certainly was true. I have ancestral wills in which my Virginia and North Carolina farmer forefathers left individual spoons and blankets to children. But while all of us inherit the deficits from previous generations, only a few inherit the wealth. Too much inherited wealth is not good either for the people who inherit it or for our society. If our interest is socializing people into the world of work, we need to protect the children of the rich from the damaging effects of inherited wealth, the sort of unwarranted self-satisfaction and pompous arrogance of people such as William F. Buckley.

The crucial issue is that we have erected continuing structural impediments to success. The geography of our cities is wrong for young people. The typical city has an inner core of banks and major offices, together with streets and alleys where the underground economy is carried on. Surrounding this core is a decaying area owned by real estate speculators and landlords, occupied by the poor, and richly productive of children. Further out are the areas in which the middle class lives in owner occupied houses set on lots big enough to ensure low density, with

high quality schools for their not too numerous children. Circumferential super highways surround this urban mass, and where the highways cross those that enter the city there are shopping malls, modern factories, and car dealerships. The mass of young people is near the downtown. The mass of jobs is at the periphery, and there is little public transportation to help young people get there. Near home there is legitimate work that batters self-esteem and kills hope--cleaning buildings, making deliveries, serving hamburgers. There is also an underground economy in which most people just survive, but in which a few make enough to show off spectacular clothes and cars. Meanwhile, the malls and repair shops and high tech factories on the periphery are looking for workers.

The other type of downtown job is closed out to young people until they have substantial training. The downtown offices with windows, which look out over the slums, are occupied by people with M.B.A. degrees, accountants, and lawyers. The occupants are, as one of my friends put it, "male and pale". These jobs are beginning to be open to women and minority men, but only if they have the appropriate degrees. It is hard for people who have not taught minority students to understand their desperate desire for paper credentials. I have had a student put off an operation for a growing tumor, not for the usual reason of denial, but because he was the first person in his family to graduate from college and was not going to take a chance on surgery depriving his family of seeing him graduate. One valuable function of inner city colleges, such as CCNY, Temple, Wayne State, and the University of Massachusetts/Boston is to provide credentials, and hence access, to young people who would otherwise stay outside the office building, looking up.

A few years ago, as the baby boomers hit the job market, jobs really were scarce. Wages dropped, relative to the cost of living, because there were too many

people for too few jobs. Right now we are entering a short "window of opportunity" in which, with the baby boomers safely at work, we have far fewer young people entering the work force. We might use this time for some intensive effort to bring all young people in out of the cold.

For middle class suburban adolescents, the problem is not a shortage of work opportunities, but intrusion of work into time that might more profitably be directed to school. We are faced with the paradox that poor adolescents cannot find work, even though they need the money, while middle class adolescents work far too many hours, at jobs that typically offer too little in the way of training for adult responsibility. For such young people, cooperative programs between school and workplace could be developed, with schools providing training (for example, in computer use) and work supervisors guaranteeing that young people would not be placed exclusively in dead end jobs.

In one of my classes, college students are given the task of getting to know an adolescent and of writing a biography of how he or she developed. They are almost always shocked by the age gap that even four or five years produces--they listen to different music, recognize different "celebrities," and talk a different code for dates and clothes and fun. As nuclear families adapted to a world in which corporate promotions moved them over the face of the country or even the globe, children lost contact with grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, and neighborhoods. Most developed and clung to a peer group, and as they did so, they ended up living in an age graded society. One value of work is that it exposes adolescents to a world in which adults participate more or less equally. But poverty isolates age groups as well as geographical ones. Young people in the slums have little opportunity to know adults informally and well. People live in worlds of different sizes. A young Jewish man, delivering for his uncle's business, was

warned about the Irish and black neighborhoods near by, "For three blocks East I was safe. I could go five if I was very careful. If I had ever gone seven I would have seen the ocean." Isolated to one age group, one small area of the city, and denied that sense of hope that opens up a personal future, children of poverty live in very small worlds.

Do patterns of disadvantage and failure, once established, tend to persist? Yes, but only under two conditions. A succession of uncontrollable painful events can induce a state of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975) in which the person simply gives up caring and trying. But this is true only if the person has no experience of success or control of the aversive environment. One successful confrontation with an uncaring bureaucrat can turn a passive occupant of a roach-infested hotel into an advocate for the poor. The other condition is structural. Disadvantage and failure persist if enough powerful people profit from them. There are homeless people because housing shortages drive up rents. Real estate owners are often rich, politically sophisticated, and generous with political contributions.

Dr. Gideonse recommends that we "reinforce norms of reciprocity, individual responsibility, and recognition of the legitimate rights of others." These are noble goals, but unlikely to be realized. We have unilaterally saddled the young with trillions of dollars of debt. This is taxation without representation. They will be paying interest and principal on our debts for the foreseeable future. We have ignored their rights. I find it surprising that they have been so slow to resent us and to reject our recommendations that they be responsible. Who are we to talk?

I do not share the faith that Dr. Gideonse seems to have in possible social and economic reform. America is more polarized into rich and poor than it has been in 50 years, and the resources of our society are increasingly unequally divided. Every

group that ever sought a fair share of power and opportunity has had to fight for it. Black Americans and women have had some notable successes in recent years, and their struggles provide a possible example to young people. But I see little evidence that young people are aware of what we have done to them, are interested in organizing, or are capable of making their voices heard. In a society of consumers, addiction is a likely kind of internal exile, suicide a way out when active protest seems impossible.

If I am wrong, and if our society does not have an overriding interest in making young people passive, ignorant, silent, and unprotesting, there are some possibilities for change. These will require more flexible ways of educating and empowering young people, then making adjustments as they assert their rights.

The first step is to provide more flexible educational methods. Currently, military training and proprietary schools are providing second chance educational opportunities to many young people who have failed or dropped out of formal schooling. Corporations are channeling funds into on-the-job training, and some, such as General Motors, essentially contain their own university. Like the invention of the practical, earthy state university a hundred years ago, the invention of these new schools provides access to new groups of students, develops skills important to society, and uncovers new sources of support for education.

We are breaking down the rigid, age-graded form of education. At the University of Massachusetts/Boston, the average student age is about 27, the majority of students are transfers (rejects and refugees) from other schools, and it is quite possible for a student to proceed at her own pace, while working to support her car and apartment. Medical school classes, which used to be depressingly uniform in age, disciplined work habits, and lack of aesthetic or political imagination, are now refreshingly diverse. I know a young woman, now a

staff physician at a well-known hospital, who was, at 16, a high school drop-out, a mother, and a refugee from an alcoholic and abusive family. The new flexibility of medical schools allows people like her to have a second or third chance at a productive career.

Research in life span development also provides some hope. Contrary to the older schools of psychoanalysis, people are not shaped totally by early childhood experiences. We go on developing throughout life and as we develop, we choose and shape our own environments (Runyan, 1982). As Dr. Gideonse notes, citing Elder's research on stress, conflict can be strengthening if it comes in small doses. Jack Block (1971) showed that young adolescent daughters of powerful women are often overwhelmed by their mothers at age 12 or so ("I can never be like that") but develop "cognitive coping" personalities, solve problems, and by 30 are much like their powerful and competent mothers. Our task is to protect young people against unmanageable conflict, while giving them the strengthening experience of facing and coping with manageable doses.

Finally, while disadvantage and failure can persist, successful and socialized effort is what gets reinforced and stabilized over the long run (Kohlberg, Ricks, and Snarey, 1984). Bright children stay bright far more reliably than dull children stay dull, and successful children continue to succeed more reliably than failing children continue to fail. If we throw a drowning child any rope at all, he can amaze us with the way he grabs hold and struggles to survive.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

David F. Ricks is Visiting Distinguished Professor at the University of Massachusetts/Boston and Professor of Psychology at the University of Cincinnati. His field of research is developmental psychopathology, particularly the childhood and adolescent antecendents of adult addictions, depression, and schizophrenia. He is currently helping to design and implement a new program in clinical psychology at U Mass/Boston, a program grounded in developmental psychology and oriented toward helping the children of the city of Boston.

A COMMENTARY

on **Sarah Gideonse's**

DETERMINANTS OF YOUTH'S SUCCESSFUL ENTRY INTO ADULTHOOD

by **Elijah Anderson**

Although black middle-class and lower-income inner-city adolescents may share many personal (psychological) problems, the socioeconomic environments of the two groups are so different that it is difficult to compare them from a sociological perspective. It is important to realize that deviance has a different meaning in these two settings. Because the poorest segments of ghetto communities appear to be slipping away from the mainstream economy due both to a lack of employment opportunities and a lack of middle-class role models, those who conform often do so to a culture which is nonconventional, or widely considered deviant, to middle-class eyes and standards. In this respect, even conformity may be deviant with regard to mainstream values. In what follows, highlights of salient aspects of this problem are presented.

In the segregated past, when blacks of various social classes were confined by law to racially separate neighborhoods and community institutions, it was not unusual to observe a well-dressed black physician follow a black construction worker, still dressed in dirty overalls, into the barber's chair. The children of working-class blacks attended school with the children of black lawyers, doctors, and wealthy businessmen, and the pews of black churches were filled with worshipers of every social status.

These successful people carried wide local reputations as "big shots" and were treated as pillars of the community. Their behavior, mannerisms, and habits were studied, talked about, and imitated. Along with working men who had regular "slaves" -- meaning jobs that required hard physical labor -- they served as visible, concrete symbols of success and moral value, as living

examples of the rewards of hard work, perseverance, decency, and propriety. During the "manufacturing era," such jobs were plentiful. And in those days, "working hard" for a living was generally seen as a positive value. Having babies out of wedlock was deviant, and to be young, single, and pregnant was considered to be "messed up." Furthermore, to be "on welfare" was to gain a stigma. The work ethic was strong, even for those who could not always find jobs.

Recently, the inner city black community has experienced an outflow of middle and upper income people such as the doctors, lawyers, and certain church leaders. Some have died, while others have gravitated to opportunities elsewhere. Their children have been educated in schools outside the ghetto, and they too, are living elsewhere. Even some of the working class have moved to better neighborhoods, and some of their children have been educated and have joined the professional class of blacks. As these blacks move into the wider, white society, they become abstractions to the local black community, leaving the poorer, uneducated blacks who remain in the inner city without direct role models and instructive agents of social control.

Because successful blacks are inclined to leave the ghetto, there is growing gradual social, economic, and perhaps political estrangement between the black upper classes and ghetto dwellers. Poorer blacks remain isolated, experiencing marked social distance between themselves and those who have left the ghetto behind. In their wake, crime, drug use, and anti-social behavior have become powerful social forces, working to underscore status lines drawn within the community. Fear, distrust, and distance abound, particularly toward the anonymous young.

Often lacking even the most rudimentary skills, and at the same time scorning subsistence jobs, young ghetto blacks tend to be discriminated against

by prospective employers. In part, this is because of their inability or unwillingness to meet basic rules of middle class propriety with regard to dress and comportment. But it is also because of their skin color and what that has come to mean to the prospective employer. While it may be argued that society has failed these young people, working and middle class blacks, who have successfully worked their way out of the ghetto, often hold them responsible for their own predicaments. To many blacks residing in inner city areas, as well, members of the underclass are often viewed as objects of fear and embarrassment and treated as such.

To the stable working class, the underclass symbolizes "how low a black person can fall from decency." On the streets, they are "trouble" to be avoided. Blamed for using drugs, for selling drugs, and for committing most of the street crime, they are the pimps, the hustlers, the prostitutes, the hoodlums, the poor, and the dangerous young black males. The easy stereotype goes that such people "think nothing of making two or three babies with no way to care for them. They don't want to work and have no get up about themselves." In pursuit of status opportunities and out of a sense of genuine concern for their own survival, the middle class and those who aspire to it tend increasingly to leave the underclass alone.

One of the most important casualties of the growing split between the stably employed and the underclass is the relationship between "old heads" and "young boys," an important institution of the ghetto. In the past, the old head was a man of stable means who believed in hard work, family life, the church and, most important, passing on the philosophy of life he had developed through his own positive experiences with work to younger men. The old head's acknowledged role was to teach, support, encourage, and in effect socialize young men to meet their responsibilities with regard to the work ethic, family

life, law, and decency. He was the personification of the work ethic, equating it with moral value; in his eyes, an employed, working man was a good and decent man. The young boy, on the other hand, was a younger man who had confidence in the old head's ability to import useful wisdom and practical advice about getting through the world successfully and living well. Very often, the old head played the role of surrogate father for those who seemed to need such attention. The primary message was about manners and the value of hard work, how to get a job and keep it, how to dress for a job interview and deal with a prospective employer. In a word, how "to make something out of yourself."

But, today, as meaningful employment opportunities have become increasingly scarce for young black males, drugs accessible, and crime a way of life for many poor, inner-city youth, the generalized relationship between the old head and the young boy has been undergoing serious stress and some change. As the circumstances of the urban ghetto have changed, the old heads have lost prestige and attractiveness as a role model for young boys. The advice they once imparted no longer seems relevant. One of the most important factors in this change is black youth's glaring lack of access to places in the regular economy. When work and other rewards are not forthcoming, young boys easily reach the conclusion that the old heads' moral lessons about the work ethic are no longer applicable to the present day situation. As a result, the traditional old heads are held in relatively low esteem. Older established blacks often retreat from positions of leadership because they fear crime and personal injury. And young men who are looking for direction to achieve a positive life have little or no personal assistance in doing so. With the expansion of the drug culture and its opportunities for quick money, a new role model -- young, often a product of a street gang, and indifferent at best to the law and traditional values -- is displacing the traditional old head as a shaper of youthful values. This

emerging role model is often younger than the traditional old head and is the product of a street gang; he makes money fast and scorns the law and traditional values. If he works, he does so grudgingly. He makes financial ends meet by involving himself in the underground economy. He may dabble in the drug trade or be a full-time participant. As far as family life goes, he shuns the traditional father's role. His is a "get over" mentality, and, as the traditional old heads comment, he is out to beat the next fellow.

This emerging figure is in many respects the antithesis of the traditional old head. He derides family values and generally feels little conventional responsibility to the family's financial welfare. He hardly thinks he has any obligation to his string of women and the children he has fathered. In fact, he considers it a measure of success if he can get away without being held legally accountable for his out-of-wedlock children. In his hustling mentality, generosity is a weakness. Given his unstable financial situation, he would feel used when confronted with the prospect of "taking care of someone else." Women for him are conquests, to be obtained by mentally "running a game," by feigning love and caring to get what he wants, only to discard them at the merest adversity. His self-aggrandizement consumes his whole being and is expressed in his penchant for a glamorous lifestyle, fine clothes, fancy cars as he attempts to influence people through displays of such trappings of success. Eagerly awaiting his message are the young unemployed black men, demoralized by a hopeless financial situation but inclined to look up to this figure and try to emulate him. But for his recruits a trail of broken lives, trouble, jail, and even death may be in store.

As this kind of person proliferates on the street corners of the ghetto community, he works to blur the line between the traditional old head and himself. Many of the young boys fail to draw a distinction, having never known

any old head other than the one they now see. Consequently, many young men who are looking for direction from available male role models to achieve a more conventional life have little direct and personal support in doing so.

In black urban communities of today, one's ability to take on the responsibility of a family is strongly related to one's work opportunities. Stable family life, respect for the law, propriety, respectability, self-esteem, and decency are all strongly related to gainful employment. We know the importance of a good job for a young black man. But what constitutes a good job? Thirty years ago, a young migrant from the South could find a factory job that paid him roughly $5,000 a year. That calculates to some $22,000 in today's dollars. That was enough for a man of the working class to start and raise a family. Today, jobs with salaries even approaching this figure are scarce in the inner city. They exist in offices, hospitals, factories, and other large institutions which are increasingly outside the inner city. As a consequence, many young blacks are left to work at factories and other large institutions which are increasingly outside the lower reaches of the emerging service economy, including fast food concerns. They are fortunate to make $5,000 a year, an amount that would not encourage an intelligent or rational person to attempt to establish a family. There is more to a good job than money. Many young black men in today's ghettos will not engage in the hard and dirty work their forebears were willing to endure. They want not only livable wages, but good benefits as well. If such jobs were available, young men would rush after them, as earlier generations of blacks did. It is not so much that the work ethic has declined in the black community as it is that good jobs are unavailable. When good jobs are unavailable, the work ethic loses its force.

Even in the most destitute ghettos, decent people continue to believe in the infinite value of work, even for jobs that are increasingly unavailable. The

rise of the attractive underground economy is particularly dismaying to such people, but the regular economy offers few places for young inner city blacks to become gainfully employed. The main problem, then, is not simply an individual one. Rather, it is deeply connected with the changing economy and the social structure of opportunity in American society.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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A RESPONSE TO COMMENTARIES

Sarah Gideonse

Drawing on broad research and clinical experience, Professors David Ricks and Elijah Anderson describe in vivid and concrete terms the barriers our society presents to young people. Their comments greatly add to my more theoretical discussion.

I am surprised that Professor Ricks finds me so optimistic about the possibilities for change. (Certainly I am less so after reading the two commentaries!) I, in fact, doubt that society now has the capacity to engage in fundamental social and economic reform. A reason, certainly, is one that Ricks offers -- the current situation profits powerful people, like those he cites who benefit from homelessness. An illustration I give is the secondary labor market that benefits industries with seasonal production, low profit margins, and a fluctuating demand for their products. Other reasons that fundamental change is unlikely are mentioned in the paper: lack of money, lack of knowledge, lack of control.

I do argue, from my reading of research and theory, that human beings have an inborn and developed capacity for change. We can help adolescents overcome previous adversities, keep them in school, and prepare them for decent jobs. We are beginning to understand some ways of accomplishing this. However, whether we have the will to do so is another question. And if the economy cannot provide jobs, all bets are off.

I am far less sanguine about changing aspects of the culture that so trouble Ricks and Anderson -- a culture that raises spectators, consumers, and hustlers and fails to support its families and schools. I think the commentators are saying that both the ghetto and mainstream culture are promoting lousy values and offering lousy role models for its youth; we should not be surprised by the results.

In one way I am even less optimistic than Professor Ricks. Temporary "floundering" may be typical of most young people's early job histories. But those who continue to flounder are the problem, not the majority who eventually succeed. Many young people become discouraged by their first experiences with the job market, with discrimination, with the scarcity of good jobs and chances for responsibility, and with their failure to succeed. These experiences can contribute to young people's developing passive identities.

I concur with Professor Ricks about the limited usefulness of the individual and environmental explanations of poverty and youth problems; indeed, this is a major point of my paper. The explanations represent a false dichotomy; lead poisoning and malnutrition are two good examples. They also over-simplify and distort reality. Who could argue with the wonderful way that Ricks encapsulates the issue: "Widespread individual deficits are to social failure what the pulse rate is to the damaged heart, a surface indicator." The last ten pages of my paper describe research and theory that draw on other explanatory models, on the complex interactions among individual, familial, and societal variables.

My paper gave what may have been misleading attention to these traditional explanations because of their centrality to public discussion on the causes of poverty and youth problems. A revival of "culture of poverty" ideas is underway, not just among conservatives but among social critics sympathetic to the poor's plight. Proposed solutions focus on changing individuals and families, seen as the culprits, rather than on correcting failures of distributive justice. If we are to move beyond this approach, surely an examination of its fallacies can help.

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American Youth: A Statistical Snapshot (July 1987) *by James R. Wetzel*

Drawing on the latest, statistically reliable government surveys, this demographic review captures much of the diversity inherent in a collective portrait of American 15-24 year-olds. Includes data on marriage, childbearing, living arrangements, income, education, employment, health, and juvenile justice. Historical trends as well as future projections are presented along with *12 charts, 18 tables.*

Current Federal Policies and Programs for Youth (June 1987) *by J.R. Reingold and Associates*

Who is doing what for youth in the federal government? This concise survey of current federal policies and programs for youth in Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, Justice and Defense provides a one-of-a-kind resource for researchers, practitioners, analysts and policymakers who want quick access to accurate information about federal youth policy. *Includes state-level allocation tables.*

Youth Policies and Practices in Selected Countries (August 1987) *by Rosemary George*

Presents the salient features of the post-compulsory education and training policies of 11 foreign countries designed to smooth the transition of now-college bound youth into the workplace, The countries are: Australia, Britain, Canada, Finland, France, West Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Norway and Sweden. *Includes tables.*

Single copies of these three publications will be available for a *limited time* from: **William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Youth and America's Future,** Suite 301, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036-5541

Multiple copies may be purchased at **$5.00 each** from either organization:

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Suite 310, 1001 Connecticut Ave., NW
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National School Volunteer Program
Suite 320, 701 North Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

The following **Working Papers** were prepared for the Commission's deliberations by a variety of scholars and practitioners. They are available at **$10.00 each postpaid** from the **Institute for Educational Leadership** (See previous page).

Youth Transition from Adolescence to the World of Work *by Garth Mangum.* **Commentaries** *by Marvin Lazerson and Stephen F. Hamilton.*

Youth and the Workplace: Second-Chance Programs and the Hard-to-Serve *by Thomas J. Smith, Gary C. Walker, Rachel A. Baker, (Public/Private Ventures).* **Commentaries** *by Gary Burtless, Jacqueline Danzberger, Morton Sklar, Richard F. Elmore.*

Who Will Train and Educate Tomorrow's Workers? The Financing of Non-College-Bound Young Workers' Recurrent Education *by Robert Sheets, Andrew Hahn, Robert Lerman and Erik Butler.*

Youth and Work: What We Know, What We Don't Know, What We Need to Know *by Ivan Charner and Bryna Shore Fraser (National Institute for Work and Learning).* **Commentaries** *by Sue E. Berryman and Hayes Mizell.*

The Bridge: Cooperative Education for All High School Students *by Cynthia Parsons.* **Commentaries** *by Dennis Gray and David Lynn, Morgan V. Lewis, Roy L. Wooldridge.*

What Does the Independent Sector Do for 16-24 Year-Olds? *by Miriam M. Wood.* **Commentaries** *by Virginia Hodgkinson and Leonard Stern.*

The Interaction of Family, Community, and Work in the Socialization of Youth *by Stephen F. Hamilton.* **Commentaries** *by John Ogbu and Paul Riesman.*

The Difference that Differences Make: Adolescent Diversity and Its Deregulation *by Melvin D. Levine.* **Commentaries** *by Michael Wald and John H. Martin.*

Transitional Difficulties of Out-of Home Youth *by Joy Duva and Gordon Raley.* **Commentaries** *by Eileen Pasztor and Peter R. Correia III and Anita Fream.*

The Transition to Adulthood of Youth with Disabilities *by David Vandergoot, Amy Gottlieb and Edwin W. Martin.* **Commentaries** *by Sharon Stewart Johnson and Diane Lipton and Mary Lou Breslin.*

Mutuality in Parent-Adolescent Relationships *by James Youniss.* **Commentaries** *by Ann C. Crouter and John H. Lewko.*

Communities and Adolescents: An Exploration of Reciprocal Supports *by Joan Wynn, Harold Richman, Robert A. Rubenstein and Julia Littell with Brian Britt and Carol Yoken.* **Commentaries** *by Diane P. Hedin and Judith B. Erickson.*

Determinants of Youth's Successful Entry into Adulthood *by Sarah Gideonse.* **Commentaries** *by Elijah Anderson and David F. Ricks.*